

SCOPING AND INFORMATIONAL MEETING

STACY - APRIL 30, 2015 - 6:00 P.M.

BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

AND DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

In the Matter of the Combined Application of North Star
Solar PV LLC For a Site Permit for and Route Permit for
the North Star Solar Electric Power Generating Plant and
Associated 115 kV High-Voltage Transmission Line in
Chisago County, Minnesota

MPUC DOCKET NO. IP-6943/GS-15-33

Lent Town Hall
33155 Hemingway Avenue
Stacy, Minnesota 55079

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1 MS. SMETANA: Okay. So you can see that
2 David put up some sort of ground rules, if you will,
3 for the public comment portion. Again, please be
4 sure to state and spell your name for the court
5 reporter. We want to make sure we have an accurate
6 record. And we do need to have one speaker at a
7 time. She can't record what two people are saying
8 at the same time.

9 So the first person is Richard Daniels.
10 If you could please come forward, hopefully this
11 mike is going to work for you.

12 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: He had to leave.

13 MS. SMETANA: Oh, he had to leave. Okay.
14 Very good.

15 Next is Patrice Sang.

16 MS. SANG: A few comments I guess. You
17 had said, Tracy, that the State is neutral and that
18 the agencies are neutral, and yet I also heard that
19 the State's required to have a certain percentage of
20 solar plants as well. And there were a few site
21 alternatives, is what was mentioned by the Minnesota
22 Department of Commerce. And so would that place
23 some of the --

24 MS. SMETANA: Excuse me. Can you move
25 the mike just a little bit closer? Thank you.

1 MS. SANG: -- so would that place some of
2 the representation of the citizens at risk based on
3 a possible conflict of interest with the forces that
4 be of the required solar part and not having
5 alternative options?

6 MR. BIRKHOLZ: This is going to be
7 difficult, but we are in a situation that the State
8 Legislature has made a policy decision. So the
9 state is bound to the 1.5 percent participation of
10 solar energy, of retail sales of electricity in
11 Minnesota. So to do that, we have to have solar
12 farms. And that adds up to a lot. There's a lot of
13 electricity.

14 Now, I want to make clear that I'm not
15 saying we can't have alternatives. There are a lot
16 of alternatives on the table across the state.

17 For this project we're building up and
18 down. And if this is indeed to your question, if
19 there are alternatives you want to make, my
20 restriction was that we have to make sure that they
21 fit the other things that are at play in this
22 project, which is there have to be land rights,
23 there has to be available access to sun energy and
24 there has to be availability of connection to the
25 transmission.

1 If that's what you meant by not being
2 allowed alternatives, you can make alternatives, and
3 by all means do, but it's not like saying this could
4 be better over here in this county instead of
5 Chisago. It may be that the Commission decides that
6 in the end, after hearings, after all the
7 information. So, no, I don't mean to suggest that
8 you can't make alternatives. I'm just saying what
9 the restrictions are for the environmental review.

10 MS. SANG: And I guess my comment was
11 more towards the state protecting the rights and
12 well-being of residents versus the pressure of the
13 state being required to have the solar part. That's
14 the concern I had. And I guess hearing that
15 tonight, that kind of goes into weighing the risks
16 and the benefits of the projects that would be
17 initiated and with an objective that should be
18 positive outcomes for our Minnesota citizens and the
19 citizens that, you know, the agency represents.

20 And in three key areas, I'll go through
21 them quickly, I just have a few general questions
22 today. On the area of health, which is real
23 important for all of us, does the importance of
24 public health and safety in Minnesota only apply to
25 high population density?

1 MR. BIRKHOLZ: No.

2 MS. SANG: Or does it apply to low
3 density population, as well, then?

4 MR. BIRKHOLZ: Yes. We have to determine
5 what we might consider a public health risk and what
6 may mitigate that. Those are the kinds of questions
7 that are on the table and that's what the Board is
8 to determine. We've got to define the parameters of
9 the question and the answer that's being asked.

10 MS. SANG: And that comment is relative
11 to page 70 in the docket. There's like a 95-page
12 docket on the PUC that specifically mentioned that
13 it did not -- public health and safety was not
14 affected because it was not a high population
15 density. That's why I'm asking that question.

16 The next one is would you -- What would
17 you -- I guess what would be your acceptable level
18 of increase in health risk to the citizens of
19 Minnesota as it pertains to this project and the
20 other solar projects, as well, and the levels of
21 EMF?

22 MR. BIRKHOLZ: Not our -- And this is
23 serious, totally serious, not our decision to make.
24 That is -- All the final decisions on permitting and
25 conditions are -- rest in the hands of the Public

1 Utilities Commission. Our job is to find out all
2 they are. Are there going to be EMF issues. If
3 there are EMF issues, what do we know about them to
4 date, what can we find out about them. Those public
5 health issues, if they are public health issues,
6 that's the information we want to compile so that
7 when the Public Utilities Commission makes its
8 decision, it has as much good information available
9 as possible.

10 MS. SANG: So, in other words, that
11 should be a question asked to the Public Utilities
12 Commission?

13 MR. BIRKHOLZ: And that would be a public
14 -- that will be a question you could certainly ask
15 at the public hearing, before the Judge. And by
16 that time you'll have the environmental assessment
17 and you'll see what kind of answers it's provided.
18 And if it hasn't provided answers satisfactory to
19 you, then you should be bringing them up to the
20 Judge at that time.

21 MS. SANG: And then would you agree that
22 a home is the largest investment for families within
23 the U.S. -- within Minnesota?

24 MR. BIRKHOLZ: I'm not going to --

25 MS. SANG: Well, most often it is. So

1 what is the short-term and long-term projected
2 decrease in the value of homeowners' property
3 adjacent to this project?

4 MR. BIRKHOLZ: Excellent question, and we
5 don't know yet, really, honestly. Like I told you
6 right at the outset, we're not coming in here with a
7 bunch of questions and a preconceived idea that
8 we're going to lay down for you. We're here to find
9 out what questions you have. You're asking
10 questions that we want to know. So we don't have
11 all the answers to start with.

12 MS. SANG: And the key -- I'm just -- I
13 want to get on health and socioeconomics because
14 these are factors that will greatly affect our
15 families.

16 On the environment, as well, you had
17 mentioned earlier that you will be doing a review of
18 the environmental factors, not just the -- the
19 climate, the culture, our neighborhood, how they
20 will be affected, not so much focusing only in one
21 area of environment, but really looking at the whole
22 boat, the whole picture, correct?

23 MR. BIRKHOLZ: Right. And in that draft
24 you can see that each of those is part of it,
25 socioeconomic and public health and all the natural

1 environmental issues. In the end, if they're not
2 listed, the ones that you bring to the table.

3 MS. SANG: Those are the only questions
4 that I have for today. Thanks.

5 MS. SMETANA: Next on the list is Michael
6 Madden.

7 MR. MADDEN: I pass for now.

8 MS. SMETANA: Okay. Thank you.

9 Tom Hoch.

10 MR. HOCH: Tom Hoch, H-O-C-H. Can I
11 submit something?

12 MS. SMETANA: Yes.

13 MR. HOCH: That's for you. And I have
14 two others I'd like to pass out for the audience, if
15 I can, one on each side, I would guess.

16 MS. SMETANA: Sure.

17 MR. HOCH: I'm just going to pass those
18 out, start with that. That was a map that I took
19 out of PUC's website, 15-33 docket. That shows the
20 section that I live in, which is surrounded by 800
21 acres. And where it is on that map is the project
22 location, they have scratched us off in the center,
23 like with a pencil. The first time I saw that I
24 almost cried. We're just being scraped off the
25 earth and I took exception for that.

1 I'm one of seven families located in the
2 center of this project. I'm concerned for the
3 health of my family. To my knowledge, there's not a
4 solar farm in the nation that has families living in
5 the center surrounded by 400,000 solar panels. I do
6 not want my family to be guinea pigs so some
7 out-of-state company can profit with the taxes I pay
8 that will support this project.

9 I would ask the Commission to do a
10 detailed study of EES units and voltage surge. We
11 are being placed in the center of an electrical
12 field with 50 inverters that have been proven to be
13 unsafe. In good conscience I will not be able to
14 have my young grandchildren visit me for fear it
15 would cause them problems later in life with their
16 health.

17 The environmental studies should include
18 the environment of the homeowners if we have to
19 stay. I did not move here ten years ago to be
20 surrounded by solar panels and an eight-foot high
21 chain link fence. It would be like living in a
22 prison. I would like to submit the North Star map.
23 I did that at the beginning. Sorry. According to
24 that map, we don't exist.

25 I have many more concerns, but I will let

1 other members address them. Thank you for your
2 attention.

3 MS. SMETANA: Did you want to hand the
4 written comments in?

5 MR. HOCH: Yeah. I have extra ones.
6 Thank you.

7 MS. SMETANA: Next is Dean Mandel.

8 MR. MANDEL: Dean, D-E-A-N, last name
9 Mandel, M-A-N-D-E-L. I'll try to keep it brief. I
10 appreciate the opportunity to not only present
11 information today, but --

12 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: Louder.

13 MR. MANDEL: I appreciate the opportunity
14 tonight to share verbally some information and
15 obviously to be able to follow up in terms of
16 information.

17 Simply put, I think as lay people and
18 residents, there's a perception that solar energy is
19 green and perceived as free, simple, safe. It's
20 aesthetically pleasing.

21 In reality, what the proposal by North
22 Star Energy fails to share is that there is also EMF
23 energy which is being radiated and which has not
24 been shared fully in the proposal or to the
25 Department of Commerce or, specifically, to the PUC.

1 It goes back to the importance of public health and
2 safety.

3 We can talk all we want about how silent
4 solar energy is or the view of our property or the
5 chain link fence or the barbed wire. What I just
6 want to throw out to the group tonight is that
7 within the proposal by North Star Energy, the
8 engineers also decided to become scientists and the
9 scientists became medical experts when it comes to
10 WHO documentation, which stands for the World Health
11 Organization. This ties back to the importance of
12 these electromagnetic forces or fields.

13 And I know that the Minnesota Department
14 of Commerce and the PUC actually have been involved
15 in this back in 2002. There's actually a white
16 paper that has been stated that goes through -- And
17 it's a Minnesota state interagency working group on
18 EMF issues. This white paper, back in 2002, stated
19 very clearly that they concluded that the current
20 body of evidence is insufficient to establish a
21 cause-and-effect relationship between EMF waves or
22 radiation and adverse healthy effects, even though
23 at that time the documentation was very clear in
24 certain clinical studies that showed that EMF
25 correlates to carcinogens, or cancer. The medical

1 specialist that this particular working group used
2 was the Minnesota Department of Health.

3 While they happen to be experts in many
4 areas of public health, they are not necessarily the
5 world's experts in EMF. Those happen to be the
6 World Health Organization, who in 2007 said exactly
7 that, that EMF correlates to an increase in exposure
8 and an increased health risk to the public
9 correlates to carcinogens. I believe that this
10 information is being overlooked. I believe that
11 it's important to bring that up, as the residents
12 and some homes are being purchased but others are
13 not.

14 We talked about a marketing program for
15 solar energy company of being a good neighbor, and
16 yet many neighbors are being excluded in that
17 process.

18 The reason I wanted to share that today
19 is because in looking at the Department of Commerce
20 information, he said that the Number 1 factor for
21 environmental assessment is to avoid exposure. The
22 best way to avoid exposure is not to put that solar
23 program in a residential area, where the leading
24 experts in the world -- where the leading experts in
25 the world, not the Minnesota Department of Health,

1 have shown very clearly as a task force that there
2 is a public health concern.

3 I'll leave it at that. I'll share my
4 information in writing. Would it be appropriate to
5 send it to the Department of Commerce or
6 specifically to the PUC?

7 MS. SMETANA: At this stage, for the
8 environmental assessment, it should go to
9 Mr. Birkholz of the Department of Commerce. Thank
10 you.

11 MR. MANDEL: Thank you very much.

12 MS. SMETANA: Next is Donna Johnson.

13 MS. JOHNSON: D-O-N-N-A, J-O-H-N-S-O-N.
14 Since the speaker system is very poor in this
15 building and I didn't hear most of everything that
16 was being said, if somebody has said something that
17 I didn't get, please bear with me.

18 I guess my first question is, the
19 investment is \$180 million. Where is this coming
20 from? How much is coming from the federal
21 government, the state government and the county, if
22 any?

23 MR. WHITNEY: The \$180 million is a
24 private investment. The project does benefit from a
25 30 percent investment tax credit being offered by

1 the federal government through the end of next year.
2 And to my knowledge, there's no direct benefit from
3 the state. The project will pay approximately
4 \$350,000 in property tax. The vast majority of that
5 resides locally, to the county and the township and
6 the cities.

7 MS. JOHNSON: So there's no money coming
8 from the federal government here for subsidiaries or
9 -- It's all private; is that what you said?

10 Unknown SPEAKER: I'm sorry. I didn't
11 quite hear. The speaker system is bad.

12 MR. WHITNEY: Yes, the \$180 million is a
13 private investment. The project does benefit from a
14 30 percent investment tax credit offered by the
15 federal government through the end of 2016.

16 MS. JOHNSON: So what happens after 2016
17 if that does not continue?

18 MR. WHITNEY: We expect the project to be
19 operational by the end of 2016 and capture that
20 value. What the industry does after the change, I
21 do not know.

22 MS. JOHNSON: So you can't tell me it
23 would be profitable after 2016; am I correct of
24 that?

25 MR. WHITNEY: The project was proposed to

1 Xcel assuming the capture of the government tax
2 credit.

3 MS. JOHNSON: Okay. The next question I
4 have, how much -- how much study have you done with
5 the solar panels in this part of the country to see
6 if they're cost-effective? Because, you know,
7 everybody that lives here, if you go out in the
8 middle of the winter, when it's 20 below and it's
9 cloudy, tell me how those panels are going to be
10 working effectively. I can understand in the
11 summertime, but I can't understand the wintertime.

12 MR. WHITNEY: The expected production of
13 the project, as presented and proposed to Xcel,
14 helped basic -- helped the project determine the
15 power price that was necessary. The project was
16 selected out of 111 projects, and this is one of
17 three most cost-competitive, most cost-effective
18 projects. So this represents some of the most
19 cost-effective solar available in the United States.

20 MS. JOHNSON: But have you ever studied
21 it in Minnesota to find out? I mean, how many
22 panels have you put and studied in Minnesota?

23 MR. WHITNEY: The expected generation
24 from the project is site specific.

25 MS. JOHNSON: Okay. Because this is

1 interesting. We're snowbirds and we go down to New
2 Mexico for our winter. And in November there was an
3 article in the Las Cruces paper and it came from
4 California and from Los Angeles. And I'll just kind
5 of read this over so everybody can understand what
6 I'm talking about.

7 The largest solar power plant of this
8 type in the world, once promoted as the turning
9 point in green energy, isn't producing as much
10 energy as planned. One of the reasons is as basic
11 as it gets: The sun isn't shining as much as
12 expected.

13 Sprawling across roughly five square
14 miles of federal desert near the California-Nevada
15 border of the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating
16 System opened in February, with operators saying it
17 would produce enough electricity to power a city of
18 140,000 homes. So far, however, the plant is
19 producing about half of its expected annual output
20 for 2014, according to calculations by the
21 California Energy Commission, and it goes on and
22 talks about. This is what I'm concerned about.

23 Now -- And this solar plant was in Primm,
24 Nevada. And if anybody knows where Primm, Nevada
25 is, it's right on the border between Nevada and

1 California on Interstate 15, and it gets plenty of
2 sun and heat. So if they can't produce enough, how
3 can a solar farm here in the state in the middle of
4 winter produce enough electricity to generate so
5 it's cost-effective?

6 MR. WHITNEY: We expect the North Star
7 project to generate 204,000 megawatt hours of
8 electricity a year. I think that's substantiated if
9 you read the Aurora document, which is a
10 100 megawatt solar project using the same
11 technology. They anticipate generating almost
12 exactly the same amount of electricity.

13 The data that we used to derive that
14 generation is from a national, well-known energy
15 lab, and they use long-term meteorological data.
16 All over the country we have sites very close by
17 that were used to ground that estimate.

18 MS. JOHNSON: Where were the sites?

19 MR. WHITNEY: One of them was the
20 Minneapolis-St. Paul airport.

21 MS. JOHNSON: Okay.

22 MS. SMETANA: Next is Joyce Goodson.

23 MS. GOODSON: Pass.

24 MS. SMETANA: Then we will move on to
25 Mark Koran.

1 MR. KORAN: Hello, everyone. Again, I'm
2 Mark Koran, K-O-R-A-N. I'm also a resident and a
3 member of the Lent Township Planning and Zoning
4 Commission as well.

5 I just have a few comments, and I think
6 it reflects the majority of one of the reasons that
7 people are here today and the concerns people have.

8 This is an impact -- Or I guess it's a
9 significant impact to our rural quality of life and
10 the reason most people are here. The primary reason
11 most people are here and I think the consideration
12 of the PUC should be to retain our total rural
13 quality of life and improve it or protect it in
14 every way, shape or form you can, with special
15 consideration for those that are directly impacted
16 and those that are sharing property lines.

17 And as you heard stories already this
18 evening, there are people that are surrounded by it
19 and I call them severely impacted. Most people of
20 Minnesota in the farming communities, for all the
21 reasons that they moved here, to enjoy a high
22 quality of life, farm life, you know, there's
23 seasons. There's more than just construction and
24 winter in Minnesota. There's also farming season,
25 harvesting and planting, harvesting, growing, those

1 are all aspects of the quality of life people expect
2 when they walk out the front door in this community.

3 On top of that, wildlife, a significant
4 benefit of moving and living in this community. And
5 all of these things are at great risk when you look
6 at the size and the scope of this project proposed.

7 Unfortunately, as we've learned, we're
8 always a couple years behind, as residents, from the
9 legislation that creates these opportunities. So we
10 have huge concerns about how are those things going
11 to affect us. Why should one community have this
12 significant size and scope of project embedded
13 within our backyard.

14 I think some of the suggestions that we
15 would pose to the PUC and everybody involved from a
16 permitting perspective is that we think the
17 developer should take special consideration for
18 screening in every way, shape and form to minimize
19 any negative impacts not just on those residents
20 that share a border with these properties or with
21 the development, but also the transportation
22 corridors.

23 We live in a scenic byway. The St. Croix
24 River byway is a part of this community. A huge
25 section of our community is wildlife preserves and

1 state land. It's the sole reason people are here.

2 Many of the local planning and zoning
3 boards we've set aside and looked at some reasonable
4 standards for screening. We would expect that the
5 PUC, even though the energy companies have enabling
6 legislation that allows them to bypass the planning
7 and zoning, we would expect and require that the PUC
8 require them to follow zoning planning and zoning
9 ordinances as it relates to screening, and not just
10 minimal screening.

11 We do think that this legislation, I
12 think everybody who tracks it, this proposed
13 legislation I think some of the southern solar
14 farms, to have offsets or buffer zones and setbacks
15 of 400 feet. I think that seems reasonable for
16 anybody who has a resident or property abutting one
17 of these facilities.

18 I think a special consideration should be
19 taken for those significantly impacted, those that
20 share more than one property line with the project
21 of this size. I think significant compensation or
22 requires compensation for the significant loss in
23 value and the quality of their life. When they walk
24 out the front door, they don't expect to see a vast
25 array of industrialization of thousands of acres or

1 a thousand acres.

2 I think consideration of buyouts should
3 be required for those that are willing to or in a
4 position to. You know, buying out sounds like a
5 great option. Many people don't have an option. We
6 were a depressed economy. This area hasn't
7 recovered. It's great from the developer's
8 perspective because land values are so low, not so
9 great for a homeowner, who's thrown into a position
10 where they have to consider having to move, because
11 this is their retirement home and their retirement
12 community.

13 I think the people that moved here, you
14 know, they had no expectation that this would occur,
15 and we've been under attack for the last six, eight
16 years.

17 I think those that are severely impacted,
18 the minimum screening requirements for those that
19 don't have the option to move or buy out should be
20 dealt with not only by expanding the buffer zone or
21 the setbacks, but to have significant screening to
22 block the entire view of this array. I know it's
23 impossible for a two-story home, but there are ways
24 to dramatically improve that property. And when the
25 size and scope of this project is \$180 million, it

1 would seem like a minimal cost to protect our
2 residents and try to preserve the quality of life.

3 I think the other recommendations are, as
4 we've tracked what's happened in the community
5 within the state, we have an Aurora project which
6 was also a 100 megawatt project distributed over 24
7 or 26 sites. I would recommend that no one
8 community should bear a thousand plus acres of
9 continuous solar farms. I think they should all be
10 distributed. Let everybody share in the benefit of
11 this great green solar energy that's been pushed
12 upon us.

13 The only reason that these sites -- Or
14 the only reason that these have proven or that we've
15 talked about cost-effective projects out of the 111
16 that are proposed is because we've created a market
17 that requires our energy producers and sellers to
18 buy from them and the federal tax credits. If not,
19 these discussions wouldn't even be occurring.

20 So I think the distributed sites are a
21 great idea because I do think there are alternative
22 siting processes. I think the cost they can tack
23 into. And much like the large solar garden
24 projects, tack into or connect to all of the many
25 substations and connectivity points in the grid all

1 over the state.

2 And, finally, I think the PUC should
3 expand. I think the frustrated most people have
4 here is these residents have been informed and
5 notified. Most residents haven't. This affects the
6 entire community, and I would expect that the PUC
7 expand the notifications outside of the minimal
8 requirements they adhere to today. These are large
9 projects that affect a lot of people's quality of
10 life not just in those that live directly adjacent
11 to them, but those that commute through them as
12 well.

13 We're typically two years behind in all
14 the state and recommendations, so the residents feel
15 that we're always on the last end and we have no
16 voice. We're hoping that you take these
17 considerations seriously and protect us for every --
18 and our real estate value and our total quality of
19 life in every step you can. Thank you.

20 MS. SMETANA: Next is Phil Carlson.

21 MR. CARLSON: My name is Phil Carlson.
22 I'm a resident of Lynn Township and I'm also on the
23 Lynn Township Planning and Zoning.

24 And you need me to spell my name?

25 P-H-I-L, C-A-R-L-S-O-N.

1 And I'm proposing a site consolidation,
2 and it involves both the Aurora and the North Star
3 project. As you know, we've already got the Aurora
4 on the south end. I'm proposing that we reconfigure
5 the layout of the North Star site. It would be
6 advantageous to both Aurora and North Star because
7 they would be able to have some joint synergies
8 there as far as the substation for them.

9 Right now with the configuration they
10 have in play, there's 45 homes that are negatively
11 affected with visual pollution, so to speak, or
12 possible health risks, whatever. And if you moved
13 to the location that we're suggesting, these 45
14 homes would not longer be affected. Only one home
15 would be negatively affected with this move, and
16 that home, I think, is affected by one of the people
17 that would be selling the additional land.

18 I believe that North Star would have
19 preferred this move in the first place in this
20 layout, but because Aurora already had this property
21 under contract with options for their project, North
22 Star was unable to approach those people.

23 And I think they would realize this is a
24 better proposal, but they weren't able to. And now
25 Aurora is in a position of trying to find something

1 to use the land for. And if you could find the
2 project, we could consolidate those as well as other
3 problem areas that Aurora is having with their
4 permit as far as, for example, Wyoming.

5 If the Wyoming site was moved up here and
6 put into this area, it would affect -- it would have
7 a positive impact on 22 additional homes down in
8 Wyoming with no impact to people up here because
9 this is all out in a prairie, what they've referred
10 to as a prairie. It's all open and it's all high
11 ground. It's all built and it would reduce the
12 perimeter of fencing required by three to four miles
13 of fencing by combining this. It would also reduce
14 the screening cost and they would be able to share a
15 substation. Now, this is something they've got to
16 work out, okay, but it could be easily done at this
17 point.

18 And, actually, I used to be a facilitator
19 when I worked for Cummings. And if they can't do
20 it, I can work with both sides and get them to.

21 I'm pretty sure I could do that. So I
22 guess -- Yeah, that's probably all the comments I
23 have right now, as well as, you know, following
24 local zoning ordinances is really important.

25 In the future these projects should be

1 more open. We were blind-sided by people coming and
2 asking questions about flagging out in fields and
3 tests being done on pilings or posts being driven in
4 the ground, people ask me what's going on. Well, I
5 had no idea what was going on and I'm on the
6 planning commission. That's not right. I guess
7 that's all I have for comments.

8 MS. SMETANA: Next is Jesse Kohler.

9 MR. KOHLER: I'm not a public speaker.
10 My name is Jesse, J-E-S-S-E, Kohler, K-O-H-L-E-R. I
11 work for Xcel Energy. And I'm a nobody there, but
12 I'm friends with a lot of people that are higher up.
13 And this project has been talk about for years and
14 we are now just getting notified of it. That, to
15 me, is wrong, okay.

16 Now, I have been doing some research on
17 this stuff on the internet. The internet is the
18 wonderful thing. From what I've been reading from
19 people, is that they've been complaining about the
20 loss of wildlife. Now, for me, I moved to where I
21 live because of the farm field in my backyard. We
22 have bear, we have turkeys, deer and squirrels.
23 From what I understand, is once one of these solar
24 fields go in, nobody even sees any squirrels
25 anymore. For me that's fine, but the other wildlife

1 I'd like to see.

2 And what I've also heard is a lot of
3 people complaining about the painful glares off
4 solar panels that give them headaches.

5 And other people are complaining about
6 the fences that go up because it looks to them like
7 a prison fence. That, to me, I don't need in my
8 backyard.

9 The farmland was a selling point for me.
10 I would like to know why we weren't notified sooner
11 of this.

12 And I've also done some research on this.
13 I have an article right here all about solar panels.
14 And this is from a realtor. It's all over the
15 internet. It says, wow, these are some great
16 articles about solar, solar panels and solar farms.
17 Still digging I found one really negative problem:
18 Property values decrease by 30 percent when your
19 neighborhood has a solar panel farm nearby.

20 Okay. Since I got this letter in the
21 mail from you guys, I have decided to put my house
22 up for sale. I've lived there for almost ten years.
23 I love my house. I love my neighbors. Guess what?
24 All the realtors up in this area know about the
25 solar field going in, okay.

1 I've had my house on the market for one
2 month tomorrow. Guess what? I've had one showing,
3 one. Do you know how bad that is? Houses are
4 selling in six days or less. So you try to tell me
5 that this thing is not going to depreciate our
6 value. That would be a lie.

7 And I've also been finding out, too, on
8 367th Street -- If you guys aren't aware of where
9 that is, it's right in my backyard pretty much --
10 that the solar company has been buying houses from
11 these people. They're giving them fair market value
12 and 20 percent on top of that. So I would like to
13 get bought out or not have this thing come in my
14 backyard, period.

15 So for your alternative, there's plenty
16 of swampland down here in Carlos Avery. Go ahead
17 and build it there, I don't care.

18 Otherwise, I also seen an article. It
19 was just on KSTP news. There was a woman who paid a
20 solar company \$16,000 to put solar panels on top of
21 her roof. And her electricity bill, after eight
22 years it will be 100 percent paid for with the solar
23 panels on her house, and it will be \$2.61.

24 And also on my research I looked at solar
25 fields and they only create about 10 percent of our

1 electricity. To me that's not enough. We have
2 enough power plants and everything else around here.
3 We've got enough transmission lines.

4 And from my understanding also, and I
5 don't know if this is true or not, but Xcel Energy
6 wants to put transmission lines running over into
7 Wisconsin out of this substation.

8 So I guess my last question is, is how is
9 this going to benefit us. That's all I have.

10 MS. SMETANA: Gwendalyn Swenson.

11 MS. SWENSON: My name is Gwen Swenson,
12 G-W-E-N, S-W-E-N-S-O-N. I live in Sunrise Township.
13 I'm just down the road from the proposed solar site,
14 and I would like to speak in favor of the solar
15 farm. I believe I'd like to think that we're
16 forward thinking enough that we will look for
17 alternative energy, and this is a renewal source of
18 energy.

19 Also, we didn't want the power plant in
20 our backyard because of the carbon emissions. There
21 would be no carbon emissions with the solar farm.
22 Also, there would be low maintenance once it's
23 built. There wouldn't be an increase in traffic on
24 our roads and our neighborhood.

25 Also, with the native grasses, the

1 Minnesota grasses they're planning to plant
2 underneath the solar panels, this would be a great
3 haven for our pollinators, which would be the
4 butterflies and the bees in the area.

5 And the area that I'm familiar with is
6 zoned agriculture land. So when we originally
7 started farming the land in this area, there weren't
8 the residents in the area. And I understand their
9 concerns about their homes, but I do also realize
10 that when we started farming, they weren't there.
11 You could look for a ways and not see any homes.
12 And I understand why they want a home out in the
13 agricultural area. I know their concerns are real,
14 but I also think we need to look at the chance of
15 doing something positive for our future and leaving
16 something for our children. We need to be good
17 stewards of the earth. Thank you for your time.

18 MS. SMETANA: Dennis Anderson.

19 MR. ANDERSON: Dennis Anderson,
20 D-E-N-N-I-S, A-N-D-E-R-S-O-N. In full disclosure, I
21 just want to identify myself as the son of two of
22 the people who have been approached to have their
23 land leased for the solar farm.

24 I guess my first question is, and I'm
25 thinking that others may have the same question, for

1 years whenever there has been an industrial or a
2 commercial plant, they always talk about an
3 Environmental Impact Statement. What is the
4 difference between an EIS and an environmental
5 assessment?

6 MS. SMETANA: David, take that one.

7 MR. BIRKHOLZ: Essentially it's the same
8 thing, but in the state, an alternative process has
9 a shorter timeline. So we have a shorter time line
10 to produce the document. And in an EIS there's a
11 provision built in for drafting an EIS and then
12 comments on an EIS and a final, where an EA, the
13 environmental assessment, is a single document. But
14 it is prepared and released before the public
15 hearing so people can comment on it at the public
16 hearing.

17 MR. ANDERSON: Okay. Thank you for that
18 explanation.

19 I was also kind of curious, as some of
20 the people here already mentioned, about the
21 relative location of the North Star site to the
22 Geronimo-Aurora site that is a few months ahead.
23 I'm thinking does the state -- When they come up
24 with their definitions for what should be included
25 on the various maps that the solar operators need to

1 prepare, I noticed that that was kind of a glaring
2 omission from the maps that included that locale.

3 And I was thinking that it might be a
4 nice thing, especially for the public, to see the
5 relative location of both the North Star as well as
6 the Aurora site, since they're kind of in the same
7 business. And as others have said, you know, should
8 this be the place for the concentration of solar
9 sites. I guess I just think that that's something
10 that would be a good element to include in all these
11 maps.

12 My third comment is, unlike the wind farm
13 generation, where you can still farm around the
14 massive monopods, you don't have that ability here.
15 The land totally goes over to solar and there is no
16 further crop farming.

17 Now, I guess I can say that that's maybe
18 a plus for some of the houses that are close by,
19 especially on what we call the prairie, because once
20 the grass grows in and you have a nice vegetative
21 cover there that really is never disturbed, I don't
22 think they'll have the springtime dust and wind
23 problem that probably causes them to have to keep
24 their windows closed quite a bit. So I just wanted
25 to say maybe that's one plus for the solar farm as

1 opposed to crop farming, you won't have as much dust
2 in the air.

3 But I guess the real gist is that we know
4 that the farmland here is not the most productive
5 farmland in the state, but it is still farmland.
6 And who knows what lies ahead of us in 25 to 30
7 years. Will solar still be the thing to do or will
8 there be a new technology that will replace it and
9 the solar will no longer be feasible.

10 I guess I'm kind of asking for the State
11 to have some sort of assurance built into either
12 regulation or whatever that by the time these 25 to
13 30 years are up, that crop farming will not all of a
14 sudden become a prohibited activity on this land.
15 In other words, the local municipalities, perhaps
16 having enjoyed the greater tax benefit from the
17 solar on their tax base, will maybe rezone the land
18 away from agriculture into commercial or some other
19 activity that maybe would not be compatible with
20 agriculture.

21 True, 25, 30 years I may be dead, Gwen
22 Swenson may be dead, but her sons, Kurt and Carl,
23 will still be farming. I would hope that they would
24 be able to farm and not have to look elsewhere for
25 land that is currently zoned agriculture as opposed

1 to being zoned to something that prohibits
2 agriculture.

3 So I don't know if there's any feature in
4 the state legislation or agency regulations, but
5 since it seems like the State is wanting to take the
6 lead on all of the planning and zoning requirements
7 and really not give the local units of government
8 too much say, if they're going to take on that
9 responsibility, then maybe they should also have an
10 assurance out there that when the solar comes to an
11 end, that the land can revert back to its
12 agricultural nature.

13 And I guess my last comment is, listening
14 to everybody here with their points -- And, really,
15 everybody does have a valid point. I think it's
16 something that all of us just need to keep in mind,
17 is that, you know, are we altruistic and is there a
18 greater good for society as a whole coming because
19 of this solar farm.

20 True, none of us want to have an eyesore
21 in their backyard. The concern of the
22 electromagnetic fields from EMF, is that really any
23 worse when you're looking at a solar site some
24 distance from a person's home as opposed to EMs
25 emanating from a cell phone that a person is holding

1 next to their head.

2 What about the electromagnetic fields
3 from these high voltage power lines that we see
4 adjacent to homes and shopping centers. I'm amazed
5 when I go to Stillwater and see their shopping
6 centers over by Highway 36. You have the big power
7 lines going right through the parking lots and I'm
8 thinking, okay, interesting. You have all the
9 people coming to and fro and nobody seems to care.

10 So I guess, in conclusion, there's a lot
11 of stuff to take in. And I really don't envy the
12 position of the State staff to have to evaluate
13 this, but it's important that they listen to
14 everybody and figure out, with the best information
15 available to us, what is the best decision not just
16 for the greater good, but also for the people who
17 have to have this in their backyard. There probably
18 is some give and take required on both parties, but
19 I think we need to do something to leave our
20 children and grandchildren better off than perhaps
21 what we are right now. Thank you.

22 MS. SMETANA: Richard Daniels.

23 MR. DANIELS: Thank you. Richard Daniels
24 D-A-N-I-E-L-S, 10132 367th Street. I'm one of the
25 seven houses that live near the donor home

1 completely surrounded by this project. Had this
2 project been just two or 300 acres to one direction
3 from my house, I would not be here opposed to it.

4 However, being completely surrounded by
5 these units and not knowing how much heat, how much
6 glare would be coming off of them and how they would
7 affect the resale value of the house, I'm afraid I'm
8 opposed to it. To approve this project, I feel,
9 would not be considered Minnesota nice.

10 What I'm concerned with basically is the
11 amount of reflection and glare that would be coming
12 off the units during the day as well as how much
13 would be coming off during the evening. We get some
14 clear skies and a full moon with this many units, we
15 could have a considerable amount of evening heat and
16 evening glare. I would have hate to have to spend a
17 lot of money putting blackout shades on all my
18 windows.

19 And I'm not sure exactly how it would
20 affect the local wildlife. We do have quite a few
21 bald eagles and some of the turkey vultures that fly
22 over this particular area. I'm not sure how it
23 would impact them. It's something that needs to be
24 looked at.

25 And basically those are the main concerns

1 I have at this time. I missed the other comments.
2 I'm sorry for missing out on the other people
3 speaking. I don't know what they covered, but I had
4 a county meeting I had to attend. Thank you.

5 MS. SMETANA: Thank you.

6 Vicki Kaz.

7 MS. KACZMARCZYK: My name is Vicki
8 Kaczmarczyk, K-A-C-Z-M-A-R-C-Z-Y-K. That's why I go
9 by Kaz.

10 I'm an area realtor for RE/MAX in the
11 Forest Lake. I've been serving this area for over
12 30 years representing buyers and sellers. And I
13 heard a couple comments from other people back here.
14 My job here is to educate the buyers and sellers.

15 I did not hear about this project until a
16 few months ago. And if I didn't hear about it, I'm
17 sure many others haven't heard about it. It will
18 adversely affect your values on your properties.

19 The Number 1 consideration when we're
20 doing a market has been and always will be location,
21 location, location. As buyers and sellers, they're
22 going to ask these questions: What are we going to
23 be looking at; what's in our backyard; what's in our
24 front yard. And if we don't tell them if we know,
25 it can come back to haunt you, as sellers and as

1 buyers. They'll come back and you have liability if
2 you knew something and you didn't tell them.

3 I don't know how long this is going to be
4 in question; but if you're thinking of selling your
5 homes right now, you have to disclose those things.
6 That's why I'm here, to learn a little bit more so I
7 can help educate buyers and sellers. That's why I'm
8 here.

9 MS. SMETANA: Kris Anderson.

10 MS. ANDERSON: Hi. I'm Kristine,
11 K-R-I-S-T-I-N-E, Anderson, A-N-D-E-R-S-O-N. I live
12 at 37206 Keystone Avenue in North Branch. I'm one
13 of the seven houses that are completely surrounded
14 by the North Star Energy project.

15 In response to my neighbor, Mrs. Swenson,
16 who failed to let you know that she also owns
17 property around me, she at some point must have sold
18 the property to the previous owners, who sold it to
19 me three years ago. And it's interesting that they
20 did not sell out all the property around their
21 house.

22 As for thinking ahead for our children, I
23 see your point, as yours will be collecting yearly
24 checks while mine will have more frequent yearly
25 check-ups.

1 I would like to add I never received the
2 first letter that was shown up above, nor to date am
3 I a so-called willing participant in this.

4 There's -- Let me see here. In January
5 of 2015 I was approached by Chase Whitney from
6 Community Solar Energy. Since that time my life has
7 been turned upsidedown. We were in the process of
8 remodeling our house and had already put in \$25,000
9 into our upper level plus all of our own time, as we
10 were doing this remodel ourselves.

11 We moved into this home about three years
12 ago and have not stopped doing projects since we
13 moved in to try and update our property. I actually
14 share the same story with many of my neighbors, who
15 have recently invested many tens of thousands of
16 dollars into their homes.

17 After meeting with Chase Whitney I was
18 told I should hang tight, just put my life on hold,
19 basically, in order to wait and see what happens
20 with the solar project. The thing is, we don't want
21 to hang tight. We have things that we want to do.
22 I have my own life. I have my own projects that
23 need to be done.

24 I was supposed to be having a wedding at
25 my house this summer. We were supposed to be

1 putting up a pole barn for my horses right now, as
2 we speak. I was supposed to be landscaping, putting
3 in a patio and planting our field, all of which have
4 been put on hold.

5 The thing you, the State of Minnesota,
6 you, the Public Utilities Commission, and especially
7 you, Community Solar Energy, have not once thought
8 about or considered is that your -- there are
9 actually lives in the middle of this and around your
10 projects.

11 In fact, on one of your maps, which Tom
12 showed earlier, we were nothing more than a
13 scribbled out mark. Not only is that insensitive to
14 those that live within the scribbled out mark, but
15 it also shows your intentions. These intentions are
16 not pure, as in good will. If they were, you would
17 also take into consideration that an appraisal price
18 plus a small percentage would not cover replacement
19 costs for our homes.

20 We do not want to move. None of us had
21 our homes up for sale, nor were we ready to have our
22 homes appraised doing the normal things one would do
23 to upgrade a home, such as painting, updating. And
24 we certainly would not be going off an appraisal the
25 first thing in the spring, before houses start

1 selling and closing so we would have the comparison.
2 We were perfectly content where we are.

3 These are not junk homes. These are nice
4 houses in the country, which is why we moved here.
5 I love my neighbors. Our kids play and we're great
6 friends. We look out for each other.

7 All of your tactics to get these projects
8 through are rudeness. You have come in here and
9 tried to divide and concur us all as neighbors. You
10 told lies to us about each other saying that we had
11 agreed or disagreed with certain things in order to
12 try to get what you wanted.

13 Once you had someone -- Once you've get
14 someone to be deceived into signing their rights
15 away, they are not able to talk about anything and
16 are bound by that through a contract in order for
17 Community Solar Energy to be able to get what they
18 want. I'm not only holding the solar companies
19 responsible, but also the State of Minnesota and the
20 Public Utilities Commission.

21 It is just insane that you all can pass
22 through these projects and mandate all of these
23 things and not have to think about the consequences
24 for the people that pay taxes and vote to put you in
25 the seats that you sit in to make choices for us.

1 The choices that you are all making for the people
2 who live in and around these projects are careless.

3 You are not thinking about the future one
4 bit. You are thinking foolishly in the moment.
5 It's just hurry, hurry, hurry, let's get this all
6 done to make sure we get the best tax credits.

7 Does anyone remember the last time this
8 country hurried, hurried, hurried into a bunch of
9 decisions that people just made without thinking
10 things through with mortgage companies that just
11 popped up out of the woodwork and wanted to take
12 advantage of tax credit situations. And in this
13 situation that's how it relates.

14 I would think you would all not have
15 forgotten about the recent recession we were just
16 in. Can you not see that this is a very similar
17 situation, in which the government is putting
18 something out there that has to be done but that
19 should absolutely not be done near people. And all
20 these companies that are popping up out of the
21 woodwork that have not ever done anything of this
22 size, nor have they actually even managed companies,
23 owned homes or had to make decisions that impacted
24 hundreds of lives to date.

25 Do you really think they are going to be

1 around when they fail. They aren't even around now
2 with the projects that have already been put up here
3 in Minnesota.

4 The other day I and another neighbor
5 traveled over to St. Cloud, Minnesota to visit
6 St. John's Solar Garden. It is a solar garden which
7 is on 3.9 acres. I believe the people that put it
8 up would be Aurora, the same ones that are going to
9 do the Aurora-Geronimo project, the next one that
10 they're trying to push through after this one.

11 I spoke with the neighbors surrounding
12 this solar garden. Not only do the companies tend
13 to forget to maintain these panels, but I would like
14 you to really think about the 440,000 movable metal
15 parts that are out in the middle of 800 acres with
16 motors, all of which go off about once an hour for
17 ten seconds. While going off it sounds like an air
18 compressor filling. I personally witnessed this and
19 could easily hear it.

20 Along with the fact, you have people
21 trespassing onto your property to ask you questions
22 and gawk at the panels. Now, that was just one set
23 of these things. Are you guys going to guarantee
24 that they are all on the same timer or is there
25 going to be over 800 acres of solar panels that are

1 offset just a little bit, so now we have to listen
2 to it a steady minute, a steady two minutes or once
3 every other minute. I don't know. Is it going to
4 be a constant noise.

5 What I do know is that machines fail and
6 that time -- all the time. And who wants to be
7 listening to 800 acres of the air compressors or the
8 squeaking and grinding metal from all the sand that
9 will be getting in them.

10 Pictures that were represented in here I
11 think are very misinformative (sic) of the local
12 fields. As I can tell, like most of the farmers
13 would be wanting to do something like that because,
14 yes, they don't get as much off their acreage. And
15 guaranteed, there is no grass that is going to grow
16 underneath these things, especially this prairie
17 grass that is even harder to grow than normal grass.

18 That's just the panels. Now, what about
19 the inverters. Inverters make noise. How much. I
20 don't want to be listening to anything all night
21 long right outside my window in the country, where I
22 can hear nothing but noises of animals and birds,
23 which no longer will be around us.

24 This brings up another point. We have a
25 lot of wildlife around here, bear, deer, fox,

1 turkeys, bald eagles, cranes, owls, coyotes, rabbits
2 and, most of all, gophers. What is the plan to take
3 care of all these rodents that now live within this
4 800 acres of solar panels and have no natural
5 predators to come in and get them, as there is now
6 an eight-foot chain link fence with barbed wire
7 surrounding them. They will not be able to get
8 through unless they dig under the fences.

9 However, most likely they will not want
10 to come under a magnetic field of power and noise
11 and a reflection in the panels. The reflection from
12 the panels will most likely scare off most animals
13 and birds.

14 As proof to this I have pictures from the
15 Minnesota -- the one over here in St. John's. The
16 picture I have shows a cloudy day and then of the
17 sun shining. I will pass these around so everyone
18 can see there is a reflection and it is proven right
19 here.

20 I will also pass around the other picture
21 that show the panels that have no trees put up
22 around them, which is usually, I would say, a
23 mandatory thing that everybody puts forth in their
24 ideas. The follow-through, once again, is not
25 there. Even in the picture showing the professional

1 landscaping you can see the gaps and the dead -- the
2 trees that are dying in their pictures.

3 Bottom line, we should not be having this
4 conversation. I should not have to be standing up
5 here pleading my case to protect my family, my
6 investment, my animals, my children, my neighborhood
7 and the people that live in it.

8 You all should have been responsible and
9 put in place a plan for these companies to have to
10 follow when they come here. These things should not
11 be being put up around homes. Instead of putting
12 the cart before the horse, so to speak, you should
13 have had these things in place and have an
14 accountability plan for them to have to follow, not
15 the so-called checklist of them saying, oh, I met
16 with Mrs. So and So and Mr. So and So and lied to
17 everyone to try and get what I wanted and now it's
18 all backfiring.

19 I'm a business owner. In fact, up until
20 this last year I had a company in North Branch
21 Industrial Park. Each and every day I have to make
22 decisions that are going to impact the lives of
23 many. If I were as careless in my decision-making
24 as you guys are all being with your business and
25 sworn duties, I would not have a business.

1 What I don't understand and I think is
2 absolutely ridiculous is if you propose a project
3 big enough, 50 megawatts or more, and it affects and
4 impacts more lives in a community, that community
5 loses control of the decision-making and the
6 processes and procedures by which these companies
7 should have to stick to. You are all trying to sell
8 this as something great, but a project of this
9 magnitude will have huge impacts only our land,
10 community and reputation.

11 You, the State, have no other concern
12 than to just get your project done and look good.

13 You, the Community Solar Energy company,
14 want to get the project done and get out of here.
15 It is not going to look so good when it fails
16 because you have not yet done the research and you
17 push things through, not thinking about
18 repercussions. How is it even acceptable that the
19 community and city that is involved with these
20 projects have no say in what goes on with it.

21 I want answers. I want accountable
22 answers to my questions. Why do we have a 400-foot
23 setback from wildlife management areas, but we have
24 a 50-foot for human life. That is not acceptable.

25 I spoke with an electric company today

1 who goes out and they actually measure the amounts
2 of dirty energy that are put off by the solar panels
3 on people's roofs. Each and every house has dirty
4 energy that has solar panels and people are getting
5 sick.

6 Solar energy does in fact, which is
7 supported by the documents I will give to you guys,
8 produce dirty energy. It's not the solar panels
9 themselves. It's the inverters, the same inverters
10 used for wind energy. As they chop up the current
11 inverted, it creates high frequency transmits,
12 otherwise known as dirty energy.

13 The inverters have not come far enough in
14 their technology, either by choice of the
15 manufacturers or because the technology is not
16 there. They cannot handle the amount of energy that
17 is put back into them, which causes them to have
18 this dirty energy and, as a result, it has to go
19 somewhere. In this case it likely goes into the
20 ground.

21 Proof of this is with the wind power,
22 which has problems with the inverters and low
23 frequency sound, so much so that Brown County,
24 Wisconsin has declared Shirley Wind Farm a public
25 health hazardous. While I know everybody here is

1 going to try and say that wind and solar is not the
2 same, it has to use the same inverters and the
3 inverters are getting people sick.

4 It also has been proven 99.9 percent that
5 cattle react to the dirty energy by picking up their
6 feet and lessening production. I have horses, tens
7 of thousands of dollars of horses in my pasture. I
8 now know what will happen when you put 440,000 solar
9 panels in and around them.

10 I would like testing to be done on all
11 current sites which are even in our state parks,
12 including the St. John's Solar Garden, to prove that
13 there is not any negative environmental effects
14 being produced in and around these so-called gardens
15 and farms, which is really well labeled to try and
16 make it sound much better.

17 How well does it work and how does it all
18 work. Do you guys even know. Why should we be the
19 lab rats for this idea. These projects should not
20 be next to people. They should be researched far
21 more than what is currently in place before we go
22 slapping solar gardens and farms up around every
23 corner.

24 Just seeing with the wind stuff, they're
25 shutting down the wind powers. They're producing

1 too much energy for those inverters. The research
2 has not been done on the solar.

3 I have children and animals, and I'm not
4 going to just sit back and shut my mouth and let all
5 of you people go on your merry way and collect your
6 checks. I want to see the State of Minnesota, our
7 elected officials and the Public Utilities
8 Commission put into place action steps for these
9 projects so that they are safe. There needs to be
10 standards.

11 It is your job to serve and to protect
12 our state. So before you go signing on any dotted
13 line, make sure that this is such a great thing,
14 that it is great for everyone, including the
15 homeowners surrounding these projects, the cities
16 and counties, and the state as a whole.

17 I want to see a minimum setback of 600
18 feet from any property line not connected to the
19 project. I would like to see a minimum of four rows
20 of pine trees and a minimum height of eight feet and
21 be maintained at 12 feet. That way they could still
22 collect their solar, but we don't have to look at
23 it.

24 I want it in writing that these panels
25 are going to be maintained properly and that the

1 companies involved in maintaining them will have
2 consequences for unsatisfactory maintenance.

3 I would like to see that any connecting
4 homes to the project would be given a monetary
5 compensation for lost value, to be determined by an
6 unbiased third party. This would be something
7 negotiated before these projects should be approved.

8 I would like to see that any home
9 completely surrounded by these projects would be
10 bought out, if that is what is desired by the owner,
11 for a reasonable amount, taking into consideration
12 that everyone is in their own unique situation.
13 This would include replacement cost on a same or
14 similar home and moving costs. Please take into
15 consideration the Otter Tail Power Company, who paid
16 its residents three times their tax assessed value
17 when putting up high wires.

18 You know, a big thing here, too, is that
19 I'm one of seven houses. It's the first project.
20 Once that Aurora deal goes in, it encircles I think
21 like nine houses. And there's not just us, it's
22 everybody that's touching it. And like others have
23 said, everybody has to drive by it. We shouldn't
24 have to look at some industrial park in the country.
25 That is not what any of us moved here for.

1 We moved here for the farm field that
2 Mrs. Swenson and everybody else has. That's what
3 people like. That's what people enjoy. I
4 understand that farming is hard. I get that. But
5 it's going to be much harder when these things fail
6 and they're left behind.

7 I do not think the things that we are
8 asking are out of line. We already have given up
9 four months of our time researching and looking into
10 homes and trying to figure out what to do. It is
11 now your turn to stand up and do what's right for
12 everyone. Thank you.

13 MS. SMETANA: Kory Abell.

14 MR. ABELL: Kory Abell, K-O-R-Y,
15 A-B-E-L-L. Hello, everybody. I live on the corner
16 of 367th Street in Keystone. I am one of the seven
17 houses surrounded by the solar panel industrial
18 park.

19 I have many concerns about this project.
20 Health is always Number 1. With two kids ages six
21 and 11, is this going to affect them. Is there
22 anyone that can show me the facts, the truth that
23 this will not do any harm to them, to me, my family
24 or my neighbors. If so, I would like to see that in
25 writing.

1 Second, the wildlife. There will be no
2 wildlife left. You can't level off and fence in 800
3 acres of land and think this will not affect nature.

4 Here's a little story I have. A couple
5 years ago Christmas morning when we were opening
6 presents, my daughter says, look, look, the reindeer
7 are still here. Out the back patio door three deer
8 stand there. That is gone.

9 By the time this project goes through,
10 all of the other solar panel companies get to fill
11 up as much farmland as our country, state and city
12 allow them to. We will have over 2,000, think about
13 that, 2,000 fenced off non-usable acres for our
14 wildlife.

15 Noise. You can't tell me that 440,000
16 five foot by seven panels on rotating motors moving
17 all day to fill this thing won't make noise, not to
18 mention the inverters converting the power.

19 I understand the farmers. They can't
20 grow crops on the land they have. I don't blame
21 them. But the little crops they do grow help block
22 the sand from blowing. These panels, all tipped at
23 an angle, are going to funnel the north wind under
24 them and pull up all the sand. The little crops we
25 have are home for the deer and bear, coyotes,

1 rabbits, pheasants, bald eagles. I can say I have
2 seen all of these in my yard.

3 The 50-foot setback is not acceptable. A
4 500 or a thousand foot should be a minimum. How
5 many of you have been sitting at a restaurant when a
6 car pulls up in the parking lot and the sun glares
7 off the windshield into your face. Now imagine
8 440,000 of these reflecting into your home all day
9 every day for 25 years.

10 How about the construction process. All
11 the bases will have steel pylons that will have to
12 be hammered into the ground. We are talking
13 hundreds of thousands of these. Hundreds of semis
14 driving up and down our roads.

15 My road is so narrow it is hard to pass a
16 normal pickup truck, let alone heavy equipment. My
17 five-ton road will be shot by the time this
18 industrial project is to leave.

19 Another thing that worries me is the
20 company that is doing this project. Why did the
21 next bid come in quite a bit higher than these.
22 Where are they shortcutting this project. Hopefully
23 not in my backyard or my town. Thank you.

24 MS. SMETANA: Daniel Hoffman. Daniel
25 Hoffman. I guess he passes.

1 Justin Baker.

2 MR. BAKER: Justin Baker, J-U-S-T-I-N,
3 B-A-K-E-R. I'm one of the residents that lives on
4 367th Street, would be bordered by this project on
5 two sides. I'm not one of the seven homes
6 encompassed by it. But the concerns I have are,
7 first -- And they've mostly been covered, so I just
8 want to be on the record with my concerns.

9 I do feel -- understand why this is
10 trying to get pushed through quickly and it's for a
11 tax credit. And that makes it financially viable,
12 but that should be part of your assessment.

13 You, yourself, said that you just don't
14 know I don't know how many times. And this part of
15 the process you're going to figure some of those
16 things out, right? And we haven't had a project
17 this big.

18 Have you guys done a project this big?
19 What's the biggest megawatt you've done in one
20 location to date?

21 MR. WHITNEY: I think we have to get it
22 on the record. 120 megawatts.

23 MR. BAKER: In one place. And how many
24 homes did it surround?

25 MR. WHITNEY: Pueblo, Colorado is one

1 place and --

2 MR. BAKER: One place.

3 MR. WHITNEY: -- Monroe (phonetic) is
4 next to a coal-fired power plant.

5 MR. BAKER: So you installed it next to a
6 coal-fired power plant, so 120 megawatts?

7 MR. WHITNEY: 120 megawatts.

8 MR. BAKER: Okay. It just seems the
9 State of Minnesota has never dealt with this before,
10 but yet we're going to put 800 acres into it right
11 next to us. And they don't even know what this is
12 going to look like, what it's going to be like, what
13 the rules are, what the laws are for it because
14 they've never done it before. And I've heard guinea
15 pig said a couple times, and I'm not comfortable
16 being the guinea pig for this.

17 Some of the setbacks -- I didn't know
18 about this until I got a letter in the mail a couple
19 weeks ago. I haven't done the research. A couple
20 of my neighbors have. But I just want to be on the
21 record in support of some of their ideas of setbacks
22 of certain footage and limiting our view of it.

23 Because the first woman that spoke I
24 think was correct in that this is a big asset for
25 the people. This is what we stress -- We drive down

1 to the metro areas, we run businesses, we stress.
2 We sweat and we pay for our homes and we pay for our
3 taxes, which those taxes have gone up every year
4 even if our home values have gone down, but we've
5 stuck in here.

6 We've coached youth programs in our
7 community. We've gone to church. We've been good
8 stewards of this community. We've been good
9 stewards of this state. And we've been good
10 stewards to the environment.

11 We've improved our homes. We've planted
12 plants in our yards. We've done things to try to
13 improve the value of our neighbors' homes. And this
14 flies in the face of all of that. And you take all
15 of those things away from us and we don't have any
16 power. You guys do. You're our voice. You're the
17 ones that can tell them to make sure that if this is
18 done, it's done fairly and to protect the people
19 that are affected by it.

20 And for those people that are in support
21 of it, was that an official alternative that
22 Mr. Carlson gave? Because none of us are prepared
23 to -- They've had this project. They've researched
24 it. They do this for a living. And we're expected
25 as citizens to come up with an alternative site

1 that's going to be a better site than what a company
2 that does this is supposed to do. That's stacking
3 the deck against the citizens. Is that true, one of
4 our requirements is that we're going to make some
5 ground to give you an alternative site to do this
6 project at? Yeah, that's a question for --

7 MR. BIRKHOLZ: How did you --

8 MR. BAKER: One of the parts of this
9 assessment or study was for us to come up with an
10 alternative site for this project to happen?

11 MR. BIRKHOLZ: When we scope an
12 environmental assessment, it is two things we'll do.
13 We'll look to see if there are additional impacts
14 that are unique to the situation and if there are
15 viable and feasible alternatives to the project.

16 MR. BAKER: Brought from us. So it's our
17 responsibility to bring to you guys a feasible
18 alternative instead of somebody else?

19 MR. BIRKHOLZ: In all cases that an
20 alternative has come up, we do not anticipate that
21 people will have the resources of a development
22 company.

23 MR. BAKER: Right, exactly.

24 MR. BIRKHOLZ: So as I stated earlier,
25 the things that we do need to know, if we're talking

1 about alternatives in this case, which is, again, is
2 this a viable project, is the first question. But
3 it's what are the -- What you need to know, what are
4 the problems you're trying to address and how does
5 the new site address them.

6 And as we talked about, it has to meet
7 standards in this case because, again, in this case
8 it's not like a transmission line. The company
9 that's developing has to be able to do the project.
10 They have to have willing land participants and a
11 sufficient energy source.

12 MR. BAKER: Okay. Well, I think it's a
13 lot to ask of the citizens, to be able to come up
14 with all of these things. And we hope that you guys
15 take all these considerations and be our ally, be
16 our voice of concern and make sure that if this
17 project goes through, that it's done correctly, that
18 the people are protected and our home values are
19 protected.

20 I've had realtors come here talking about
21 the value going down. We've had individuals that
22 are surrounded by it that are afraid to have their
23 grandchildren come visit them. This is real stuff.

24 You guys have a big job to do and I
25 implore you to do it and pump the brakes on this

1 thing. Just because they want a tax credit for it
2 doesn't mean that we, as individuals, have to go on
3 their time line and say, don't worry about all this;
4 let's push it through, make sure they get that tax
5 credit. This should be studied. This should be
6 done judiciously and it should be done not just
7 because they need a tax credit. Thank you.

8 MS. SMETANA: Allana Baker.

9 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: She's not here.

10 MS. SMETANA: Susan Swenson. Susan
11 Swenson.

12 MS. SWENSON: I never put myself on the
13 docket. I'm sorry.

14 MS. SMETANA: That's okay.

15 Rochelle Keith.

16 MS. NELSON: Rochelle has stepped out.
17 Is it okay if I take her place?

18 MS. SMETANA: Sure.

19 MS. NELSON: My name is Minda Nelson,
20 M-I-N-D-A, last name is N-E-L-S-O-N. So I am
21 actually a student at Anoka-Ramsey Community
22 College. I do not live in the North Branch area. I
23 am here on behalf of people in the surrounding
24 communities as well as locations here.

25 My family is all farmers. I'm actually

1 the seventh generation in Minnesota alone, not to
2 mention countries before we lived here. So I
3 understand the whole agricultural view of things.
4 I've seen the lands change throughout the decades.
5 And I can tell you that my family has had to sell
6 land because of how useless it is getting.

7 Solar panels and other forms of
8 alternative energy sources are helping our
9 environment because of the future that we are
10 creating for ourselves as a whole. I understand
11 that there are certain homes that are going to be
12 negatively affected by this, but sadly, because of
13 how human beings are spread so widely across the
14 world, no matter where you put alternative energy,
15 it will misplace people. And, sadly, as much as
16 people don't want to be misplaced, some of them may
17 have to do it.

18 Honestly, if you guys really hate it so
19 much, you can come back to where I live to the west,
20 Princeton. Being misplaced sounds a lot better than
21 having no grandchildren, things like that.

22 To the gentleman that spoke of EMFs,
23 which is electromagnetic fields, the amount of
24 energy that comes off the solar panels is equivalent
25 to what comes out of your microwave. And the

1 carcinogens that come from that are actually -- If
2 you put a plastic bowl in your microwave, it's worse
3 for your children than it is coming off the solar
4 panels. It affects maybe 1 percent of people who
5 are already at high risk for cancer.

6 For people who talked about the noise,
7 I'm pretty sure that the amount of space you have
8 out here makes it so that you don't hear your
9 neighbors carburetors anyway.

10 To the person that was talking about the
11 non-notification, I understand that there's a lot of
12 times where people don't get every notice. You live
13 out in the middle of nowhere. I understand
14 perfectly well. With that kind of thing, especially
15 when projects are still in the scoping period, there
16 are going to be people that miss out on the
17 information. But this kind of scoping meeting, the
18 fact that you are here means that you are getting
19 the information at some point and you are being
20 heard and your vote is being taken as well.

21 I am speaking entirely for the solar
22 panels. I do believe that wildlife, in large
23 aspect, may be slightly affected. The grasslands
24 that would be put in underneath this, the shrubbery,
25 things like that, will actually help the environment

1 in the long run.

2 I've seen my gardens actually be depleted
3 because the bees are disappearing. Personally, I
4 hate that. I like my bees. So I want grass and
5 things like that near my home. I think the solar
6 panels, with this much acreage put aside, can
7 actually help that.

8 When it comes to your home values, sadly
9 everything does deplete that. Solar panels are a
10 lot better than a nuclear power plant. I lived in
11 Montgomery, where the nuclear power plant is quite
12 large. I remember in middle school they sent out
13 notes about iodine tablets. Solar panels will never
14 give you that issue, so I believe it is the best
15 alternative energy resource.

16 When it comes to wildlife, not that much
17 wildlife will be affected by a fence so much as it
18 is by large buildings, which will not be put in.
19 Because of the closeness of the transformers that
20 are already in place, there won't be accumulating
21 issues to the environment as a whole.

22 I honestly believe that the solar panels
23 in this area would be the best for the environment
24 as a whole. I want to question, when it comes to
25 costs and things like that, if there's going to be a

1 monetary value before the end of the process?

2 That's a question to anybody here. Is there going
3 to be a monetary value to each individual that owns
4 -- Is that going to be available to people before
5 the end of the process?

6 MR. BIRKHOLZ: I'm not sure I understand
7 the question entirely, but there will be a monetary
8 value through the property taxes paid to the
9 township and to the county.

10 MS. NELSON: When it comes to things like
11 the energy resources through Xcel Energy, is there
12 going to be an effect on people's energy bills as a
13 whole?

14 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: I can't hear.

15 MS. NELSON: I could just yell. Is it
16 possible that there's going to be any sort of energy
17 bill effects for Xcel Energy users?

18 MR. SWANSON: My name is Eric Swanson and
19 I work with the Community Energy folks. I worked on
20 the docket that Chase mentioned earlier, where there
21 were bids taken and we were one of the projects
22 selected. And in that docket, and that's all
23 reviewable through the PUC website also, the
24 analysis from a different division of the Department
25 of Commerce was that this project would actually

1 have net benefits to ratepayers compared to other
2 alternatives.

3 MS. NELSON: So when it comes to home
4 values, people will be offset and that kind of
5 thing?

6 MR. SWANSON: I can't speculate on that,
7 I really can't.

8 MS. NELSON: When it comes to things like
9 alternative energy resources, of course, there's
10 always going to be an argument. Personally, I am
11 only 22 years old, but I have spent my entire high
12 school and college career looking at alternative
13 energy sources. I've lived next to nuclear power
14 plants. I've lived near other energy sources. I've
15 heard transformers right in my backyard. It is very
16 hard for my sisters to go sleep until they get used
17 to trains driving by from coal plants.

18 I can assure you that solar panels will
19 not be that loud. I can assure you that -- When it
20 comes to the noise, when it comes to the space,
21 people are going to always have a problem with
22 energy resources. We continue to increase the
23 amount of energy that we're using. We're going to
24 have to find a way to allocate such resources.
25 Solar panels are going to be the best bet,

1 especially in an area such as this, where the wind
2 power is not as high as it is from Kansas.

3 When we're talking about the solar panels
4 down in Nevada and California, they are actually
5 producing a lot more than what some people would
6 expect up here. At the same time, even though
7 they're not providing as much as one would hope as
8 the maximum value, the ones that are being
9 implemented here are actually going to be slightly
10 higher tech. They're going to actually produce
11 better than the one in Nevada that was mentioned
12 before.

13 When it comes to looking at the future,
14 looking at your grandchildren's future, I think that
15 a solar panel would be the best sacrifice that you
16 can make right now, especially if your farmland is
17 not as productive as it used to be. Thank you.

18 MS. SMETANA: Thank you.

19 Doug Melby.

20 MR. MELBY: I'm not a real good public
21 speaker, so I'll --

22 MS. SMETANA: I need to ask you to come
23 to the mike so the court reporter can see and hear
24 you.

25 MR. MELBY: All right.

1 MS. SMETANA: We want to make sure we get
2 what you say.

3 MR MELBY: I'll try. Yes, it is Doug
4 Melby, M-E-L-B-Y. I'm one of the residents that's
5 completely surrounded by this project. I'm not
6 overly happy about it, but at the same token, it's
7 got to be in somebody's backyard. It's always
8 easier to push it into somebody else, but it's in
9 mine. As long as I'm compensated for it or somehow
10 taken care of, I guess I really don't care too
11 greatly.

12 There is health concerns about it,
13 wildlife concerns, land values, land use, a lot of
14 things to put into play.

15 Another gentleman offered moving it to
16 another spot. Well, there's always another spot. I
17 think we should just make good with the spot we've
18 got and move forward and try to impact people as
19 small as possible. Definitely take care of the
20 people that are impacted directly, like myself and
21 seven other neighbors and probably more. That's
22 about all I can say.

23 MR. BIRKHOLZ: People, I appreciate your
24 patience, and I'm not cutting it off here. I'm just
25 saying that I'm interested to hear more comments

1 that speak towards the scope of the environmental
2 assessment.

3 I think we've had a fair distribution of
4 people speaking on pro or cons. I think both of
5 those things are being heard here. If people have
6 additional comments to make towards the scope of the
7 environmental assessment, I would appreciate that
8 coming out of this meeting to help us actually do
9 the assessment that needs to be done that certain
10 people have pointed out hasn't been done.

11 MR. HOCH: Tom Hoch, H-O-C-H. And I'd
12 like to address the fact that somebody mentioned we
13 had an offer, and I'm in the middle, of buying our
14 property. Some of us did get appraisals, but we got
15 a 6 1/2 percent offer, not 20 percent, so I just
16 wanted to clarify that. And one person apparently
17 took that offer, from my knowledge.

18 MS. SMETANA: Thank you.

19 MR. HOCH: Thank you.

20 MR. BIRKHOLZ: And I do want to say there
21 is an additional meeting coming up this fall, a
22 public hearing where you can tell the administrative
23 law judge all of your opinions about what should be
24 done with this project. And that will speak -- that
25 will be open to all of you at that time.

1 And, again, my hope is to get a good
2 environmental report done to present to that
3 hearing, so you'll have some additional facts at
4 your hand to either help your case -- or not to help
5 your case, but help your understanding or that you
6 can argue at the time and present your findings.

7 MR. WALTER: John Walter. I have a
8 question on the map. Is this the new boundaries of
9 it?

10 MR. BIRKHOLZ: No. If you have that map
11 with the handout that I made, the draft scope,
12 that's not the updated boundaries. The updated
13 boundaries have been filed on the E-docket site and
14 on my website. And all it is, is a shift of ten
15 acres inside the project boundary.

16 MR. WALTER: Well, I've had a map that
17 you sent out probably six months ago, and it shows
18 part of this property line south of County Road 14.
19 This one shows nothing south of County Road 14, so
20 where are we?

21 MR. WHITNEY: I think the previous map
22 you saw was for part of the Aurora project being
23 developed by Geronimo, which is south of the
24 substation. We are a separate project. It's
25 different.

1 MR. WALTER: Oh, okay.

2 MS. SMETANA: Please come forward.

3 While he's making his way up front, I
4 just want to remind you that you have the
5 opportunity to submit written comments, as well, in
6 any of these formats and the deadline for that is
7 May 15th. Thank you.

8 MR. WAHLSTROM: Good evening. My name is
9 Peter Wahlstrom, P-E-T-E-R, W-A-H-L-S-T-R-O-M. I
10 live in Fish Lake Township.

11 So I'd like to address the environmental
12 assessment portion by scoping out first and then
13 looking at it from more of my own personal
14 self-interest. I think that we have to, in matters
15 like this, take into consideration the broader
16 impact that creating energy is having not just on
17 our local communities, but our state, our region,
18 country and even the world.

19 And as far as I'm concerned, the science
20 is very convincing, it's very clear. We don't have
21 much choice. We are going to have to move into more
22 and more alternative energy sources, renewable
23 energy, clean energy. That's the writing on the
24 wall. We have to go in that direction and we have
25 good incentives in place now to start making those

1 moves. So when we think about this from a broader
2 perspective, this is really about the future. We
3 have to keep the future in mind.

4 It's important to also take into
5 consideration present concerns, but we have to weigh
6 them against our needs for the future, and that
7 means the lives of our children and grandchildren,
8 future generations. So this kind of transition is
9 always going to be difficult and sacrifices are
10 going to be required.

11 From what I hear from the testimony,
12 people are facing, some people directly facing very
13 personally, having to make some sacrifices and
14 that's a tough call for anybody. And I respect
15 their concerns, but this is an issue that's bigger
16 than all of us.

17 And what I would say is from my
18 estimation, looking at the science, peer-reviewed
19 science, not just what pops up on the internet, what
20 we have with a solar farm is a kind of renewable,
21 clean energy that is going to have a minimum of
22 impact on the surroundings. So even though there
23 may be sacrifices, the sacrifices I think are
24 minimal, especially when you weigh against the
25 benefits this brings to the future generations which

1 we absolutely have to take into account. We don't
2 have a choice anymore.

3 If I narrow this down, scope it down from
4 my own personal perspective, and largely this
5 involves, you know, effects on property. I live in
6 a rural area. I have a neighbor who has built a
7 huge pole shed right on my property line so I get to
8 see it every day. And in that property -- or in
9 that pole shed he stores big machinery and about a
10 half a dozen motor bikes, which his children use on
11 a regular basis in his own private motocross area.

12 Now, that's his right to do that and I
13 respect that, but it's a pain. It's really a
14 disturbance to have to deal with not just the sight
15 of that big shed, but the constant roaring of those
16 bikes shattering the peace and quiet and solitude,
17 which I'm sure we all appreciate living in the
18 country. That's the reality that I have to accept.

19 A former speaker said we live in a world
20 that's becoming more populated and we can't have the
21 ideal circumstances.

22 So I guess the point I'm trying to make
23 is that the kinds of concerns that are being
24 expressed I think are being addressed with due
25 diligence by the Community Energy Solar

1 organization. I think that they are really in
2 earnest trying to mitigate these kinds of issues as
3 much as they can. I think that they are sincere
4 when they say that they want to be good neighbors in
5 putting this project in. But they also understand
6 they've got to weigh this against what our energy
7 needs are now and in the future.

8 So when I think about a project like
9 this, I try to put myself in the shoes of the
10 people, the landowners around this place. And I try
11 to apply the golden rule in the situation, what
12 would I do if I was in their situation.

13 To be perfectly honest with you, I will
14 say if I were in your situation, I would welcome
15 this project in my backyard. I would welcome this
16 project in my backyard because I believe that it is
17 going to be done with the least amount of negative
18 impact. I would welcome it for this reason as well:
19 Because I want to be responsible for creating -- for
20 contributing to the kind of clean energy future that
21 we absolutely must hand off to our children and our
22 grandchildren. And for that reason alone, I would
23 be willing to make the sacrifice.

24 In fact, I'd even go so far as to say I
25 wish that this solar farm would be put in where my

1 neighbor is and you could come out and buy him out,
2 because I would much rather have a solar farm next
3 to me than a big pole shed spewing out fumes and
4 noise all day long. Thank you very much.

5 MS. SMETANA: Anyone else who has not had
6 an opportunity to speak yet?

7 Yes, sir, come forward.

8 MR. BUTTON: My name is Don Button,
9 D-O-N, B-U-T-T-O-N. I live on 367th Street.

10 Mr. Birkholz, you wish that our comments
11 were more directed at environmental impact
12 assessment questions and comments. Is not my home,
13 is not my neighborhood, is not my quality of life an
14 environment?

15 MR. BIRKHOLZ: Yes.

16 MR. BUTTON: Thank you.

17 MS. SMETANA: Others who'd like an
18 opportunity to speak on the record? Going once --

19 Yes, sir.

20 MR. HUNTER: My name is Brad Hunter,
21 B-R-A-D, H-U-N-T-E-R. And the one thing I would
22 like to bring up that no one has brought up tonight
23 is that this solar project is a three-part project.
24 There's two in southern Minnesota and one up here in
25 Chisago County.

1 Now, I keep hearing how there's
2 1 1/2 percent of Xcel Energy power has to be
3 produced by the year 2020 I believe. Now, this one
4 was added on I believe solely because of the
5 30 percent tax credit they will receive.

6 Now, what they're not telling people and
7 that they're not letting people know is that the two
8 in southern Minnesota are more than enough to
9 fulfill their 1 1/2 percent requirement by the State
10 mandate. So this does not even have to exist for
11 them to fulfill their State needs. I think that's
12 something that needs to be -- let the people know
13 and that's something that needs to be taken into
14 consideration by the Public Utilities Commission in
15 their decision. Thank you.

16 MS. SMETANA: Others who would like to
17 speak on the record tonight? Going once --

18 MR. MADDEN: Michael Madden, M-A-D-D-E-N,
19 North Chisago Lakes. I'm just wondering, the
20 citizen last speaking actually challenged the
21 material basis and, in a sense, questioned whether
22 this was a legitimate proposition that AT&T has
23 signed onto. So I believe Community Energy needs to
24 make a statement, a response to what the last
25 speaker has made, so that we can properly evaluate

1 the facts on the ground.

2 MR. BIRKHOLZ: And those facts will
3 definitely be evaluated by a judge and by parties
4 and by a hearing and then, eventually, by the PUC.

5 But in response directly to your
6 question, yeah, that was heard at a separate PUC
7 Docket Number 14-162. And you can go back to that
8 docket, and anybody who wants can go back to the
9 record and see what's on the record for the decision
10 for the solar portfolio.

11 MR. MADDEN: I appreciate that very much.
12 There's at least 75 people here who have just been
13 told by an authoritative source, presumably, that
14 the material basis upon which Xcel granted this
15 project to Community Energy is fraudulent. And so
16 there's 75 people here who may not -- who have been
17 told something that you refer us back to a Web page.

18 MR. BIRKHOLZ: I don't understand.

19 MR. MADDEN: Community Energy doesn't
20 understand the question. Thank you very much.

21 MR. SWANSON: Again, Eric Swanson working
22 with Community Energy. And as I understood that
23 comment, it was -- the claim was that the other two
24 projects would be sufficient to fulfill Xcel's
25 portion of the statewide solar energy mandate.

1 Exactly what percent those two projects alone or
2 those two in combination with our project will
3 fulfill of the mandate depends on a whole lot of
4 assumptions. I don't entirely agree with the
5 statement that was made. I think the record shows
6 that.

7 What's more important, I think, is that
8 the Public Utilities Commission reviewed all these
9 projects together. Under the analysis of the
10 Department of Commerce that was thoroughly vetted in
11 that record, the three projects combined, by adding
12 them to the Xcel system, the impact to ratepayers is
13 lower than not adding them to the system. That was
14 the basis of the Commission's decision that said we
15 should approve this contract. It wasn't just to
16 fulfill the State energy mandate.

17 Obviously the docket never would have
18 been opened without the State mandate, that's true,
19 but the decision that was made was one of broader
20 public interest and the Commission's determination
21 was that the analysis showed that these three
22 projects, if approved, would actually be net
23 benefits to ratepayers. And that's what you'll see
24 if you look at the Commission's order in that docket
25 that was referenced. But if people have more

1 questions, I'll be happy to stick around afterwards
2 and talk to you too.

3 MS. SMETANA: Others who would like to
4 speak on the record this evening? Going once, going
5 twice, last call. I see no hands.

6 I do want to remind you again the comment
7 period closes on May 15th. We welcome -- Or I
8 should say Mr. Birkholz and the Department of
9 Commerce welcome -- We've got a --

10 MR. HUNTER: Brad Hunter again. We have
11 a court reporter. Can the people that were not able
12 to attend access this information and read what
13 happened here tonight so they know exactly what was
14 said?

15 MS. SMETANA: The answer to that is yes.
16 That information, as soon as it's prepared, will be
17 posted on the Department of Commerce website.

18 MR. HUNTER: Thank you.

19 MS. SMETANA: You're welcome. Okay. So
20 that was our last call.

21 One more. Come on forward.

22 UNKNOWN SPEAKER: About those taxes, they
23 said that North Star would be paying around
24 \$350,000, something like that, on the property
25 taxes. But just to tell you a fair deal, Xcel is

1 one of our best taxpayers in our township. On their
2 substation, which is about -- I think it's maybe
3 about 300 acres, they pay almost a million dollars
4 in property taxes. So if you're talking about good
5 deals, that's a good deal compared to \$300,000 on
6 800 acres. I don't know who did that math and who
7 does the trading there, but just so you know, Xcel
8 pays their share. Thank you.

9 MS. SMETANA: Thank you.

10 Okay. We'll try our final, final call.
11 Any other hands. Anyone else would like to speak on
12 the record tonight?

13 Okay. Again, I will remind you the
14 comment period closes May 15th. And with that, I
15 thank you much. As several of the speakers
16 indicated, we will mill about for a while in case
17 you have additional questions you'd like to ask
18 offline. Thank you.

19 (Whereupon, the public scoping and
20 informational meeting concluded at.

21 8:42 p.m.)
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25